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## Time present and time past

By ELIZABETH HOWARD, Contributing Writer Oct 17, 2018

T.S. Eliot's poem "The Four Quartets" is about time, reality and permanence. Beginnings and endings. Marcel Proust, the French novelist, wrote in a stream of consciousness that came when he tasted a madeleine dipped in tea that sent his mind on a journey of remembrance. We never know when something will trigger our memory.

As a writer, my reading and research often pull me back into the past, thinking about cultural and social issues that affect an author; reading books that have influenced how we understand a certain time and event.

For example, how do we understand the Civil War? From the perspective of a slave living on a plantation in the deep South? From the perspective of a soldier fighting in the Union Army against the Confederacy? Or through the lens of a pastor who served as a medic and held soldiers as they lay dying on the battlefield. How is war viewed through the lens of women and children?



Perhaps this is why I enjoy wandering through the Four Corners Brick House in Gilmanton. The formal Federal brick colonial was built in the 1820s, and when it was a home there were 12 rooms, six bedrooms, four bathrooms and nine working fireplaces. Behind the house is a two-story barn. At the time the house was built, John Quincy Adams was president of the United States and Samuel Bell was governor of New Hampshire. Gov. Bell was a member of the Democratic-Republican Party that was founded by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and later became the Republican party.

Now the Four Corners Brick House is filled with antiques. Treasures of all sizes and descriptions can be found in room after room. Furniture, linens, china, goblets and silver, lamps old and new, children's toys, vintage jewelry and lots of hardware, to name just a few of the things. I'm forgetting rugs, quilts and books.

As I meander through the rooms I let my mind create stories about what I'm finding. At the same time, I try to resist accumulating anything, recognizing that I already have shelves overflowing with books, cupboards filled with elegant china, covered tureens I have collected over the years, and not even a corner with room for another piece of furniture, as handsome and elegant as it might be.

However, one of my weaknesses is dolls. Especially abandoned dolls. A few years ago, on a particularly cold, black winter night just a few weeks before Christmas, I was walking past a thrift shop on Third Avenue when I noticed the window was filled with dolls. Dolls of all sorts, sizes and in varying conditions. One doll was completely naked, just a body form of pink plastic. I couldn't leave her there. She cost a dollar and when I placed my dollar bill on the shelf, the man behind the register took the doll by her feet and plunged her head down into a brown paper bag. I couldn't wait to get back to my apartment, dress her in a hand-knit outfit and tie a ribbon in her hair.

This weekend at the Brick House, I discovered a cardboard box of Madame Alexander dolls from the 1950s. Abandoned dolls. I selected one with blue eyes, blonde hair and a pleasant look. Her slightly faded dress and white apron needed to be washed and ironed.

When I look at these dolls, I think about the many children in refugee camps. I think about the children who do not live in safe and loving homes. I think of the young teenagers, boys and girls, who are serving prison sentences, often in facilities with adults. When I look at these dolls sitting on the shelf I wonder where they have come from. I wonder if they were ever loved. At the same time, I reflect back on my own magical childhood and recall the laughter and love that filled our home.



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I encourage you to visit the Four Corners Brick House and let history and time past bring back stories and memories. Imagine a horse-drawn carriage and a roaring fire. The past and the present. Beginnings and endings.

Elizabeth Howard is an author and journalist. Her books include: *Ned O’Gorman: A Glance Back*, a book she edited (Easton Studio Press, 2015), *A Day with Bonefish Joe* (David R. Godine, 2015), *Queen Anne’s Lace and Wild Blackberry Pie*, (Thornwillow Press, 2011). She lives in New York City and has a home in Laconia. You can send her a note at: [Elizabeth@laconiadailysun.com](mailto:Elizabeth@laconiadailysun.com)